

A Pilgrimage to Maria Valtorta's Tomb in Italy 12th October 2011 – the 50th Anniversary of her Death Report by Gwen Story – from the New Zealand Group

When leaving New Zealand on the plane, I knew David Murray had been admitted to hospital in Melbourne a week earlier, but there was hope that he may still be able to come on the Pilgrimage. However when I arrived in Melbourne and was told he definitely could not travel, I was devastated! He was to be the only pilgrim travelling with me to Rome, so apart from wanting his company, I was also relying on his knowledge of travel because I was a complete novice at airports. It was pleasing to be able to visit him in hospital, but very disappointing that this man who had organized our Pilgrimage was unable to be part of it with us. Only God knows why this was so.

After 2 nights of wonderful Melbourne hospitality with members of the Australian Readers' Group, the airports and flights went amazingly smoothly – my Guardian Angel (Joachim) took extra good care of me! Following 20hrs of flying it was a relief to arrive in Rome – and I could hardly believe it! I felt like a queen as my chauffeur drove me to the Casa Bonus Pastor Hotel where our group of Maria Valtorta Pilgrims met for dinner in the evening. We were a small group of 10 now, and we had to move into the mindset of not having our leader David with us. Father Edgar Rueda was able to speak Italian so we all relied on him to interpret for us.

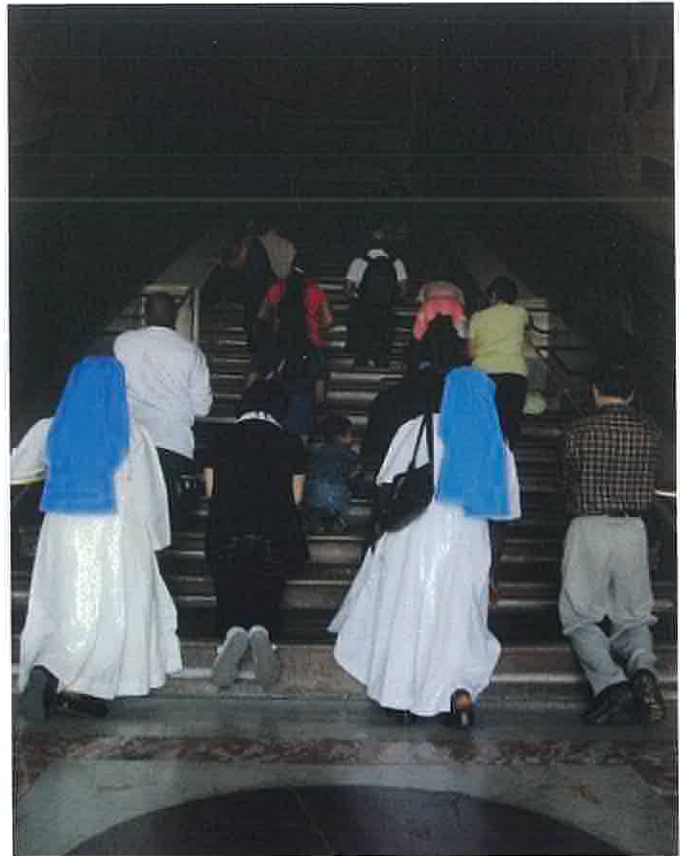
On the first morning Father Edgar celebrated Mass in the Chapel of the Hotel. Amazing – here we were, gathered at Mass where Maria Valtorta was spoken about freely! David Murray had prepared readings from Maria Valtorta's writings to coincide with each day's Gospels while on Pilgrimage, so after the homily this first morning I felt quite emotional while reading aloud to the group this first reading Jesus' words - written by Maria - aloud during Mass! This was a definite first in my little world, and here it was, happening in Rome! We were so blessed and inspired by Father Edgar's reverence towards the Eucharist during this Mass, and for the next two weeks.

In Rome we had guided tours around many places, visiting the 4 main Basilicas - St. John Lateran's, St. Peter's, St. Paul's and St. Mary Major.



(From left): David and Kathryn Haynes, Sisters Sabina Namfukwe, Christine Kabumbu and Mercy Zimba, Maria Chen, Gwen Story, Father Edgar Rueda, and Peter and Agnes Chin.

We saw many beautiful and majestic statues and paintings of the Apostles, Saints, and Popes and places where their relics were kept; knelt on the Holy Staircase, thought to be the same flight of steps which Jesus ascended in the house of Pontius Pilate; guided around the Roman Empire ruins and to the Coliseum. The amount of history around all these areas is incredible.



It was a beautiful evening when we first visited St. Peter's square - amazing to be there! People were relaxed and quietly enjoying the peaceful ambience. Because they looked so stunning and beautiful with their dark skin and blue and white habits, our 3 Pilgrim Sisters from Zambia - Sisters Christine, Sabina and Mercy - were asked many times by complete strangers if they could have photos taken with them. The Sisters were a hit! On our free afternoons we visited various places – some climbed St. Peter's Dome, others visited the Vatican Museum and Sistine Chapel, St. Peter's tomb, or wandered around the religious stalls etc.

We were guided through the Catacombs of San Callisto, and we saw the Crypt of St. Cecilia. It was so special to have Father Edgar celebrate Mass within these Catacombs.



On the day of the General Audience with the Pope, we joined thousands of other people. Father Edgar had registered our name as the 'International Maria Valtorta Group' – but our name was not announced with the many other groups. This may be because it would mean the Vatican was giving open approval to read her writings? We may never know!

We were truly an international group: 3 Chinese/Australians, 3 Zambians, 2 Australians, 1 from Chicago, 1 New Zealander – all speaking English with different accents.



Because one of Maria's titles is 'Sweet Violet of the Cross', it meant a lot to be able to place on her bed some silk violets, to become 2nd degree relics, so as to later distribute them as bookmarks to the New Zealand Readers' Group. We were able to leave a bunch of the violets on Maria's bedside table.



Most days we did heaps of walking and by evening we were very tired, but after dinner most nights we had a sharing time of Maria's writings, lead mainly by Peter Chin - who turned out to be a good leader also through the streets of Rome - as well as the Rosary, Chaplet of Divine Mercy, and sharing on the bus trips.

Assisi was lovely! A very experienced guide took us to the Basilicas of St. Francis; and we saw the Saint's birthplace, his family home, where he was imprisoned, and many relics and frescos illustrating his and also St. Clare's life. Assisi is a Spirit-filled place and is fascinating with quaint shops and pebble roads going in all directions. The view was awesome.



Off to Viareggio to visit Maria Valtorta's house! It was very special to be there, and (for me) the **'highlight of the trip'**! Anna (a close friend of the late Marta Diciotti who cared for Maria), and her English speaking daughter, Simona, showed us around the house. It was almost unbelievable to be present in Maria's bedroom where she spent so many hours writing down the visions and dictations that we know and love so much.



We were shown the wooden board she used under her mattress; her radio and bedlamp; the nurses uniform she was wearing when hit with the iron bar; and in a cabinet were pens she wrote with along with many other articles she used. We took photos and Anna told us more about Maria – via Fr. Edgar's interpreting.

After prayer in the bedroom, and Anna gifting each of us with thread Rosary beads she had personally made, our little group reluctantly said goodbye to this very blessed place.



Maria's pens



Very soon after arriving in Florence we walked through the streets to Maria Valtorta's tomb in her specially dedicated Chapel next to the Basilica of the Annunciation. A dear Priest lead us by the hand through the Church and the Servite Fathers' courtyard to the Chapel.



Florence Basilica



Courtyard & Chapel Entrance

There was Maria's tomb with her photo, some flowers and candles, at the side of the Altar. Another very blessed place to be! We prayed the Rosary, looked at photos, signed the visitors' book and just sat quietly.



Chapel and Tomb



The next day (11th October) after a guided tour through the city of Florence, and a lunch of Chinese food, we couldn't resist going back to Maria's tomb, where Father Edgar celebrated Mass, and we prayed the Rosary.

12th October: Maria's 50th Anniversary Day. We walked to the Chapel and called on Maria Valtorta to pray with us - at the time which coincided with the time of her death 50 years earlier - the Glorious Mysteries of the Rosary, with Maria's words from the "Praying the Rosary with the Writings of Maria Valtorta" pocket-booklet; then Fr. Edgar celebrate the Mass in English. There were about 35-40 participants from various countries, some from Scotland, Australia, and Italy, and possibly others. How moving and inspiring the Mass was! And how incredible that the homily was able to be about Maria Valtorta - as a Victim Soul. We were encouraged to also offer ourselves as Victim Souls - "When much is given - much is expected of us." We are obliged to give to others what we have received in Maria's writings. It was wonderful to hear a Priest speak of Maria in a homily - a dream come true! On this 50th Anniversary we especially remembered in prayer the dear people back home

who needed our special prayers, and we prayed for a miracle for a severely deformed New Zealand baby, Maiah Jane, (and also for Maria Valtorta who also needs a miracle!). Maiah has since passed on to be with Jesus, but we believe our prayers will be answered in the way that God knows best.



(Part of the whole congregation at our Mass)

In the afternoon there was another Mass for Maria's 50th Anniversary - in Italian. About 5 Priests concelebrated this Mass, and the Chapel was packed, mainly with Italian people. Afterwards the Rosary was prayed and Radio Maria recorded it.



This day was a very special time to spend with Maria Valtorta and it was such a privilege to be part of these celebrations. We left a bunch of violets at her tomb - hopefully they will still be there when some future pilgrims from the Readers' Group visit. What a lovely bunch of pilgrims I travelled with - all of us very grateful to God for the gift of Maria's writings. It was a 'once in a life-time' happening for me, and truly an honour to take part in this Pilgrimage.



(On the bus - going back to Rome)

Kathryn and David Haynes stayed on in Florence, and were able to attend a Memorial Mass for Maria, celebrated by the Archbishop / Apostolic Nuncio on 15th October in the adjoining Basilica of the Annunciation (see below). Kathryn said the Mass "was very well attended, it was uplifting to see so many devotees there".



(Knowing that the paperwork for Maria's Cause for Beatification is with the Bishop of Florence, there is reason for hope that this Cause will be underway soon. Ed.)

Some Feedback from Sister Christine

Gwen has described our pilgrimage in a very clear manner. I can only concur with and reecho her feelings. During the Papal audience, where we expected our group to be announced among pilgrims and was not, we consoled one another with the thought that great things such as Maria Valtorta's works could not be appreciated so easily, and that when the time comes for the work to be known, it will be sung on the roof tops! Jesus knows the best time - and come, it must. The thought that we were on a pilgrimage to Viareggio and Florence, to behold the **home and tomb** of Maria Valtorta respectively, uplifted my heart so much that the lack of recognition of our group in St. Peter's Square was just a trifle.

Just as Gwen has mentioned, we were really reluctant to leave Maria Valtorta's house. Being in that house, it was like coming home after having read so much about Viareggio, Marta, the bed where it all happened etc. The house felt so familiar and I had the feeling as if I was reliving the time of our dear Maria. At some point, I felt so inadequate and the question which was coming to mind was 'Am I worthy to be here? Do I really deserve to be here? Is it I Lord?'. It was unbelievable, and what made me so happy was the common excitement by our pilgrimage group. Here we were from different part of the world like the Magi, with a common belief and passion for Maria Valtorta's works (for Jesus of course). I remembered in *The Poem* that many times people who encountered Jesus were often reluctant to leave him. We too felt the same when departing from the house as well as the tomb of Maria. I just wished my convent was near one of the 2 places so that I can be part of the custodians of the holy places as a way of helping promote Valtorta works. But alas! Like the three Apostles on Mt. Tabor, we could not build the tents there, but can come back reluctantly to the reality of serving Jesus in the ordinary way.

Listening to the Homily on 12th October from Father Edgar Rueda, who passionately talked about and expressed his love for Maria Valtorta, was incredibly inspiring and encouraging. What an overwhelming experience! I await to meet Jesus face to face, and I hope I will be as excited as I was during the Valtorta pilgrimage - and even more. Let us all pray that one day a large group of Maria Valtorta devotees we will meet

as one in belief, on the day of Maria's beatification, otherwise we meet merrily in Heaven after having loved Jesus of *The Poem of the Man-God* here on Earth.

The 3 of us Zambian Sisters thank whole-heartedly all you Valtorta Readers who made it possible for us to be part of this special pilgrimage through your material and spiritual contribution. Our fellow pilgrims were a support to us in a way that cannot be put into words. We were and are now a great family. Thank you David for making this pilgrimage possible through your actual organization and later through your suffering and pain. We missed your presence but Jesus miraculously, filled the gap.

Sr. Christine Kabumbu, SCJ (Sisters of the Child Jesus), Zambia

A Post-script from David

What a joy to read Gwen's report and the other stories from the participants. It was providential that my 20-year-old hip replacement gave way just a few days before the flight - better to happen then than in Italy, as it would have been an awesome burden for the group to push me around the unforgiving steps of Italy in a wheelchair.

While in hospital we shared a little group meeting in the evening of 12th October, coinciding with the time of the morning Mass in Florence. There were 10 of us present - matching our group on the other side of the world.

I spent five weeks in hospital, and after doing what they could for me, it was decided for me to have an MRI scan, from which it became clear that the problem was not my hip but in the nerves of my lower back - requiring a spinal operation at



the Austin Hospital here in Melbourne. So I was discharged back home, where I now shuffle around with a walking frame, and am awaiting the hospital to operate some time next February.

On my first morning home in bed, I switched on to EWTN for the regular repeat broadcast of the previous day's Mass. As I'd always done before hospital, I listened to the Priest's homily, and was about to turn off the set (I would have already attended the previous day's Mass here in Melbourne) - but decided that I could now become a remote participant in the rest of the recorded Mass. After the Consecration, and while the priest began to distribute Communion, there was a voice-over inviting the watchers to pray a Spiritual Communion. I joined in, and a few minutes later I suddenly and unexpectedly burst into tears - and I sobbed, and sobbed. What a blessing that was for me - who hadn't been to Mass for so long - a kind of "welcome home, David"!!

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